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ABSTRACT

The self-described helplessness of some school districts in coping with linguistically heterogeneous groups of children (especially Spanish-speaking children) is more an admission of general educational inadequacy than a failure of bilingual education. With minimal effort and cost, a school district can offer unique learning situations that suit the needs of all students without shortchanging those whose native language is not English. The ultimate goal of a bilingual education program is individualized instruction. This goal can be achieved by flexible grouping of students, student exchange among classrooms, and differentiated staffing, which utilizes teacher aides and paraprofessionals, as well as parents and other school children. These techniques have been used successfully in the Edgewood Independent School District, one of the poorest in Texas. (Author/DS)

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BILINGUAL EDUCATION VS. SEGREGATION

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Implementation of successful bilingual programs with a culturally and linguistically heterogenous population has yet to occur, and its failure is most often attributed to organizational obstacles. Educators and school districts faced with the demand for implementation of bilingual programs still complain of difficulties in offering bilingual education to heterogeneous groupings of children having varying language dominance characteristics.

Two equally dysfunctional alternatives are often used by school districts. Spanish-speaking children are either asked to forego the benefits of bilingual instruction or to allow themselves to be segregated in order to participate in a bilingual program. What has been created is a paradox. Teaching all children in English denies the non-English-speaker equality of educational opportunity, but reversing the common methodology and teaching all children in Spanish creates a handicap for the non-English-speakers and denies them equality of educational opportunity.

This problem has been raised in the Del Rio intervention in U.S. v Texas, Keyes v Denver and others. With new legislative trends making bilingual education mandatory, the paradoxical situation might be cited by school districts as a rationale for failure to implement bilingual programs. However, methodologies to resolve the problem do exist and Spanish-speaking children can be taught in heterogenous settings.

Before outlining specific metholodogies, let us examine the prevailing educational dogma that has led to the often cited bilingual education paradox.

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This dogma projects a classroom situation in which thirty children are marched in lockstep through identical instructional activities. Yet obviously neglected is the fact that all children, regardless of ethnicity or language, have different learning abilities, varying past achievement rates, differ[illegible] interests, aspirations, motivations, pressures and learning styles. In spite of their differences, children are subject to common instructional activities directed at the mythical average or typical child. It is this methodology, based on an outmoded dogma, that cannot fail to produce the mediocrity for which our schools are becoming famous.

Coping with varying types and degrees of language dominance is no different than coping with other varying characteristics of children. Learning activities must be differentiated in keeping with children's varying characteristics. The ultimate goal is an individualized instructional program in which each activity is compatible with each individual child's characteristics, not only as they pertain to economic status, culture and language, but also to include learning ability, achievement level, motivation, interests, etc.

In order to accomplish individualization of instruction, our perception of the teacher must change. A teacher is a director of learning activities, utilizing diagnostic, prescriptive and instructional resources in carrying out learning activities for individual, small groups and large groups of children.

The following methodologies have been successfully applied as responses to the need for providing unique learning situations in keeping with the varying characteristics of children.

Groups: Progressive teachers have learned to utilize the technique of forming flexible and interchangeable groups for implementing some instructional activities. Children can conduct self-directed activities which are neither

wasteful nor disruptive as the teacher works with another part of the class. There is no reason why similar intra-classroom groups cannot be formed for bilingual instruction on the basis of language dominance.

Exchange: Another response is to regroup among different classrooms in the same school for varying periods of time during the day. Thus non-English-speaking children can be regrouped for bilingual instruction during the school day and regrouped heterogeneously for activities in which language dominance is not a critical problem.

Staff differentiation: This response to the problem of heterogeneous grouping was found very effective in the Edgewood Independent School District, one of the poorest of 1100 school districts in Texas. Staff resources were provided for teachers in order to give each child a highly individualized instructional program. Personnel utilized for individual and small group instructions were assistant teachers, aides, student teachers, interns, practicum college students, volunteer parents and other school children.

The teacher was given sufficient time to devote to training and planning activities and most of the actual interaction with children was carried out by trained paraprofessionals, recruited from the community and who reflected the child's economic, cultural and language characteristics.

Assistant teachers and teacher aides were paid paraprofessionals employed with funds made available by the State Foundation Program, Title VII, Title I, Model Cities, Career Opportunities Program (COP), employment and training programs, veteran's programs, Teacher Corps and a variety of other sources. Colleges placed a large number of bilingual interns, student teachers and practicum students. Many of the students came to San Antonio for this purpose from other

cities and from as far away as Michigan and Oregon. This type of staff resource was acquired at little cost to the district.

High school students in psychology, child care and homemaking classes participated in Youth-Tutoring-Youth (YTY) programs in the district. The Youth Tutors made substantial gains in the subject matter areas in which they taught. Truancy and disciplinary problems among the secondary students before the participation disappeared as they found respect and self-fulfillment in helping other children.

The most unexpected payoff in utilizing differentiated staffing was from parents who participated as teaching volunteers. Either the skills needed for conducting simple and routine instructional activities (in English or Spanish) have been grossly overrated or skills possessed by laymen have been grossly underrated, since the parents experienced success in working with the children. Parents who had never had much to do with the school proved that they did care for their children when the relationship with the school became positive, successful and rewarding.

This amount of successful experience in implementing staff differentiation patterns demonstrates that such staffing is practical and that the facilitating of a bilingual program need not be constrained by a lack of local wealth or the absence of certified bilingual staff.

Resource Materials: Individualization of instruction can be achieved by the utilization of a wealth of instructional media which is readily available. Motion pictures, television, slides and filmstrips can be utilized individually or in small groups. Language laboratories provide for a variety of instructional activities, as well as an endless variety of programmed instruction, self-pacing materials, books, games, workbooks and other materials.

The enrollment of small numbers of non-English-speaking children, time-space constraints or the lack of a large certified bilingual staff need not be obstacles to providing quality instruction for all children in a bilingual education program. The self-described helplessness of some school districts in coping with heterogeneous language groupings of children is more of an admission of general educational inadequacies than a problem of bilingual education.

With minimal effort and a minimum of cost, school districts can offer a third option to the two dysfunctional alternatives, segregation with bilingual education or integration without, which perpetuate the denial of educational opportunities to non-English-speaking children.